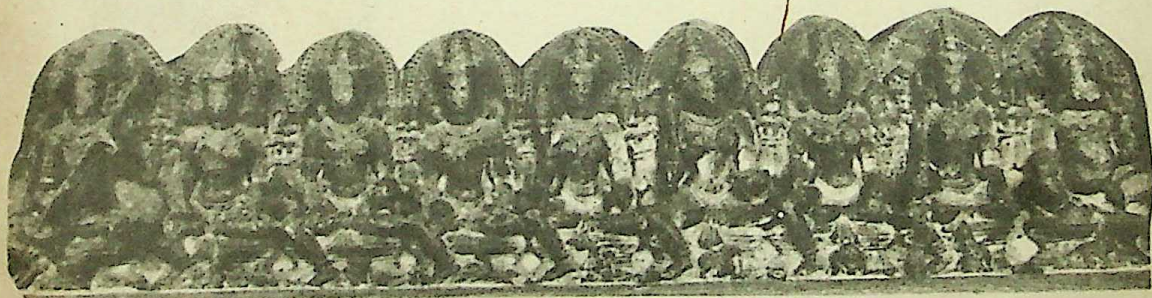


Visions of Gaṇeś'a



Visions of Gaṇeśa

Exhibition held at the Prince of Wales Museum in collaboration with the
Heras Institute, St. Xavier's college, Bombay.

22nd August — 2nd September 82.

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Ganesa, in spite of his elephantine head with blinking small eyes on either side of his elastic trunk, short arms, bulging girth overhanging his stunted legs is universally adored by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

He is the lord of obstacles (Vighnesvara) and also the remover (Vighnahara or Vighnahanasin) of the same. Hence he is propitiated, both by men and gods, at the commencement of all ceremonies. As a god of wisdom he is invoked in the beginning of any writing to insure literary success.

(Figs. 1, 2, 3)

Legends ascribe his birth solely to Siva, solely to Parvati and to both Siva and Parvati, and he is also held to be Krishna in another form. He is identified with the Parabrahman and with Brahmanaspati or Brihaspati elsewhere.

1



2



Fig.1 Illustration from a Markandeya Purana
Udaipur, Rajasthan. Dated A.D. 1708.
23.5 x 12.5 cm.

Fig.2 Ganesa. Stone.
Thane, Maharashtra. 11th cent. A.D.
36.5 x 54.5 cm.

Fig.3 Ganesa Sthapana. Embroidery.
Gujarat. Modern. 60 x 71.5 cm.

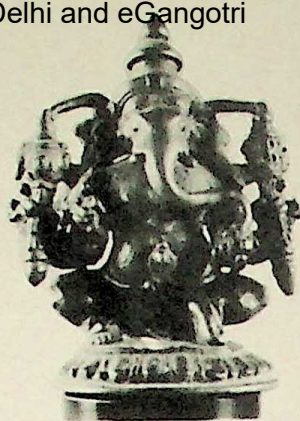
Nalini Swami Collection. Public Domain. UP State Museum, Hazratganj, Lucknow.



Numerous and intriguing tales are told in the accounts about the nature and origin of Ganesa.

(Figs. 4, 5, 6)

According to the **Suprabhedagama**, Ganesa was born of Siva and Parvati, who assumed the form of elephants to enjoy themselves, and had thus the face of an elephant. He is also said to have been fashioned by Parvati herself out of her toilet preparations and bodily impurities according to the **Siva**, **Matsya** and **Skanda Puranas**. When Ganesa obstructed Siva he cut off Ganesa's head which was replaced later with an elephant head. According to **Varaha Purana**, Ganesa sprang into existence from Siva's forehead due to his meditation. As he was too captivating to behold and as he was born without her participation, Parvati cursed



4



5



6

Fig. 4 Gajanana. Metal.
Deccan. 18th cent. 9.5 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig. 5 Valamburi Ganesa riding the Rat. Metal.
Nepal, 19th cent. A.D. 11.9 cm.

Fig. 6 Gajanana. Metal.
South India. 17th cent. A.D. 16 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

him to assure that the Sarayu Foundation Trust, Delhi and Gangotri
 belly so that all his beauty might vanish. The
Brahma-vaivarta Purana attributes loss of his
 head to Sani.

Once when Ganesa after eating too many **modakas** (ball-shaped sweets) was proceeding mounted on his **musaka**, the rat seeing a serpent tripped with fright sending Ganesa rolling down. Ganesa's belly burst and the **modakas** fell out. However, he replaced them in his belly and after killing the serpent, he tied it around his belly. When the Moon laughed at this incident, Ganesa broke one of his tusk and threw it at the Moon. Darkness then covered the earth and at the request of other gods, he willed that for ever after its brilliance in every month the Moon should wax and wane.



7



8

Fig.7 Vallabha Ganapati. Painting on glass
 Maharashtra. 19th cent. A.D. 20 x 25 cm.
 Shyamal Swali Collection.

Fig.8 Lakshmi Ganesa. Metal.
 South India. 18th cent. A.D. 9 cm.
 Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.9 Chaturthi Ganesa. Metal.
 Maharashtra. 18th cent. A.D. 9 cm.
 Heras Institute Collection.



9

Ganesa is the eldest son of Siva and his brother is Kumara or Karttikeya. He is married to Buddhi and Siddhi. To the former was born the son named Kshema, and to the latter the son named Labha. His *sakti* is Lakshmi. The *pujas* (worship) and the *vratas* (rituals) associated with Ganesa are many. On the fourth *tithi* (day) of every fortnight, one can perform the Ganesa *vratas*. His clay images are worshipped with great pomp on the fourth lunar day of the month of Bhadrapad. He is worshipped alone or in the company of Vishnu, Siva, Aditya and Sakti, the deities of the *Panchayatana*. In the *Panchayatana puja* either the icons or symbols of Vishnu, Siva, Parvati, Ganesa and Surya are worshipped in a group.

(Figs. 7-13)

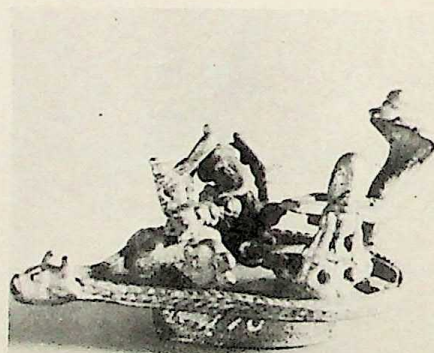
The Saptamatrikas (Mother goddesses) are



10



11



12

Fig.10 Gajanana. White Porcelain.
Probably made in Germany. Modern. 23 cm.
Bal Tambe Collection.

Fig.11 Panchayatana. Metal
South India. 18th cent.A.D. 10.5 x 12 x 9 cm.

Fig.12 Panchayatana. Metal.
South India. 18th cent. A.D. 8.5 x 8.5 x 5 cm.

often represented with the figures of Virabhadra and Ganesa on either side. Stone and bronze sculptures are also not unknown in which the number of Matrikas are only three, and they are usually, Brahmani, Kaumari and Vaishnavi. Sometimes Ganesa is also shown associated with Ekanamsa, Shakhambhari and the Navagrahas.

(Figs. 14, 15, 16,)

In the *Rigveda* Brahmanaspati is given the title of Ganapati, "the lord of the Ganas". In the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* a certain god is addressed as Dantin, who is said to possess *Vakratunda* (a twisted trunk). Ganesa is said to have written the *Mahabharata* at the dictation of the sage Vyasa, by using his own tusk as a style. In the *Mahanirvanatantra* he is described as writing down the Tantras at the dictation of his father



13



14

Fig. 13 Panchayatana. Metal
South India. 18th cent. A.D. 6 x 4.7 x 3 cm.

Fig. 14 Ganesa with Matrikas (?) Metal.
Deccan. 18th cent. A.D. 7 x 7.6 cm.

Fig. 15 Ganesa with Sakambhari. Metal. Bengal.
Pala period. 10th cent. A.D. 12.1 x 8.5 cm.



15

Siva. The Puranas and later literary sources narrate many legends connected with Ganesa.

Ganesa is worshipped in the form of *pratimas* (images) or *yantras* (diagrams) and also *pratikas* (symbols or substitutes).

(Fig. 17)

According to some, originally Ganesa was a Dravidian deity associated with animal cult. He was also considered as a village god of lower classes. We find combined in him some of the characteristic traits of both the Yakshas and the Nagas. The *tundila* (pot-belly) trait of the Yaksha is prominent in Ganesa and he also possesses the head of a Naga (elephant).

(Figs. 18, 19)

Probably Ganesa worship arose in the regions of North and North-Western India and later spread to other parts of India. He became a

16

17

18



Fig. 16 Incense burner. Brass.
Northern Indian (?). 17th cent. A.D. 10 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig. 17 Ganesabhadra. Brass.
Deccan. 17th cent. A.D. 8.3 cm.

Fig. 18 Ganesa. Brass.
Chamba. 15th cent. 16.6 cm.



most important deity around tenth century, when a mystic and a powerful sect, the Ganapatyas, established his worship to the exclusion of all other gods. The Ganapatyas have six sub-divisions and worshipped six different aspects of Ganapati, known as, Maha, Haridra, Svarna, Santana, Navanita and Unmatta-Uchchista. They worshipped the Sakti of Ganapati, as well as his linga.

(Fig. 20)

The cult of Ganesa must have been prevailing in India from ancient times, as one source says that it was carried from India to Nepal by Charumati, the daughter of Emperor Asoka. Extant images indicate that the popularity of this cult extended to Nepal and Chinese Turkestan and crossed the seas to Java, Bali and Borneo, while his worship was not unknown

19



20



Fig. 19 Gajanana. Bronze.
Maharashtra, 16th cent. A.D. 9 cm.

Fig. 20 Sampradiya Ganesa. Copper.
South India. 18th cent. A.D. 16.6 cm.

Fig 21 Butter Lamp. Metal.
Nepal. 19th cent. A.D. 15.7 cm.

21

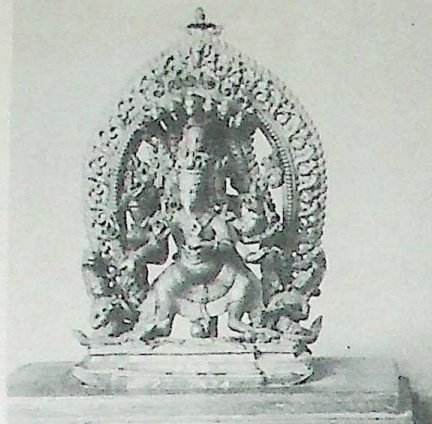


in Tibet, Burma, Siam, China, Indo-China and Japan.

(Figs. 21, 22)

The earliest Ganesa images were either of a standing or seated variety and with two arms, holding a **parasu** (hatchet) and a **mulaka** (radish). The elephant head with one tusk and the pot-belly are the features invariably present in both early and late images. **Pasa** (noose) and **ankusa** (goad) are his most important symbols and are seen in the hands of most forms of Ganesa. His image may have, two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve or even sixteen arms, but majority of such images have only four arms.

22



(Figs. 23-27)

Ganesa sometimes holds **sarpa** (snake) in his hands or wears it as a **yajnopavita** or **udarabandha**. The usual symbols held in his

23



Fig.22 Heramba Ganapati;
Metal.
Nepal. 19th cent. A.D. 6 cm.

Fig.23 Ganesa. Stone.
Kundhol. 7th cent. A.D. 39 x 77.5 cm.

Fig.24 Valamburi Bhakti Ganesa. Metal.
South India. 18th cent. A.D. 10.2 cm.

24



hands are *parashu* (axe), *modaka* (sweets), *parasu*, *danta* (tusk) and *sarpa*.

(Figs. 28, 29, 30)

His head represents the unqualified Brahman, while his trunk represents *maya* (illusion). The trunk may be shown generally as turned to the left and rarely it is turned to the right. In Trichinopoly on the Vallam Pallava period bas-relief is one of the earliest representation of Valamburi (trunk turned to the right) Vinayaka.

(Figs. 31, 32)

In the early representations of Ganesa the elephant head is fashioned in a natural manner. He may wear the head-dress of Siva, the *jata-mukuta*, but his usual head-dress is a *karanda-mukuta*. He may also wear a simple jewelled band encircling his

25



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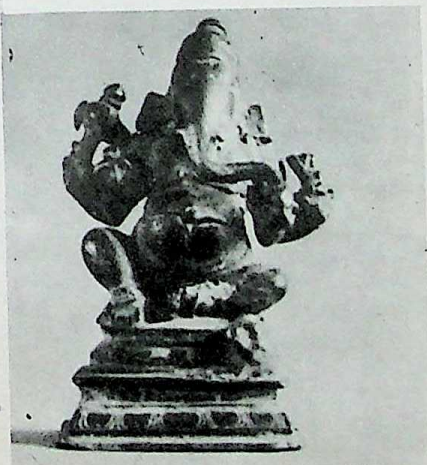


Fig.25 Ganesa. Metal.
Deccan. 19th cent. A.D. 7.9 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.26 Mahaganapati. Metal.
Deccan. 16th cent. A.D. 17.5 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.27 Sampradiya Ganesa. Metal
South India. 17th cent. A.D. 8.7 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

27



head. In all South Indian representations **karanda-mukuta** is specially depicted. Ganesa in Orissa, Bengal and Bihar wears the **jata-mukuta**, a feature absent elsewhere in India.

The **vahana** (vehicle) of Ganesa is **musaka** (rat). '**Musaka Vahana**' means 'the Lord of the Harvest overcoming the pestilence of the field mouse, thief and destroyer of crops'. **Musaka** also represents **Dharma** — an animal multiplying with tremendous rapidity, and is perhaps symbolical of fertility and productive power. Heramba Ganesa rides on a lion, which is Parvati's vehicle. Images showing Ganesa riding his brother's vehicle **mayura** (peacock) exist but are rather rare.

(Figs. 33, 34, 35)

There are forms of Ganesa with two, three, four or five heads. Fine examples of Nritya-



28



29



30

Fig. 28 Ganesa. Metal.
Karnataka. 18th cent. A.D. 9 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig. 29 Tantric Ganesa. Metal.
Deccan-Karnataka. 17th cent. A.D. 5 cm.

Fig. 30 Ganesa. Copper.
Maharashtra. 17th cent. A.D. 7.6 x 9.5 cm.

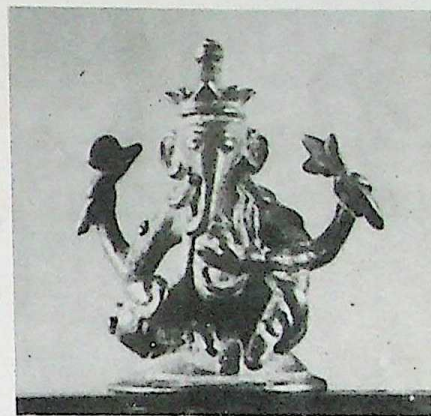
Ganesas in stone are seen at Khejuraho and Halebid. Eternal joy and ecstasy are shown so wonderfully in these images. Such images in metal imitate the poses of dancing Bala-krishna or the boy saint Sambandar. Here they are shown with the left leg slightly bent, resting on the **padmasana** and the right leg also bent and held up in the air. In some Nataraja panels Ganesa is shown as a musician playing on **mridanga**. In the Carnatic style of classical vocal music there is a special invocation to Vatapi Ganapati and Siddhi Vinayaka. Bala-Ganesa is shown nude whereas **uchchista-Ganapati** is shown with **urdhva linga** (erect phallus). In some images the third eye appears. The normal colour of Ganesa is red but sometimes yellow or white colour is also used.

(Figs. 36, 37, 38)

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31



32

Fig.31 Valamburi Ganesa. Metal.
Provenance and date uncertain. 6.5 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.32 Tantric Ganesa. Metal.
Madhya Pradesh. Date uncertain. 4.2 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.33 Heramaba Ganapati. Metal.
South India. 17th cent. A.D. 4.2 x 6.2 x 13.8 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.



33

Coomaraswamy pointed out an elephant-headed Yaksha in an Amaravati coping stone of second century A.D. A Mathura frieze of the Kushana period shows a row of five elephant-headed *ganas*. These may be examples of transitional forms of Ganesa. In the course of time the elephant-headed Yaksha developed in the form of Ganapati. A Ganesa statuette of Kushana period from the Mathura Museum is ithyphallic with pot-belly and *naga-yajnopavita*. He is two-armed and is tasting the sweet balls out of the cup in his left hand. Two-armed standing Ganesa images are also seen at Gokarn and Idigunji in Karwar district of Karnataka. These early stone sculptures may be assigned to c. 3rd-4th century A.D. These are the earliest Ganesa figures so far known.

34



35



Fig.34 Mayura Ganesa. Metal.
South India. 17th cent. A.D. 10 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.35 Mayura Ganesa. Painting on Glass.
Rajasthan. 19th cent. A.D. 14 x 19 cm.
Jayani Parikh Collection.

Fig.36 Nritya Ganesa. Red Sandstone.
Madhya Pradesh. 10th cent. A.D. 39 x 64 cm.

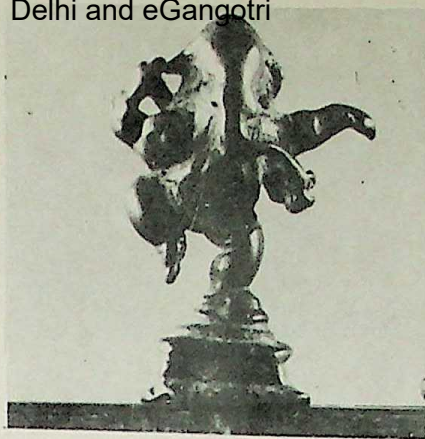
36



Two Ganesas from the Gupta period of fifth century A.D. attributed to Gupta period of fifth century A.D. To the same period may belong another Ganesa from Udayagiri. Sixth century examples of Ganesa are found at rock-cut cave temples of Elephanta, Badami and Aihole. At Badami Cave I is an early dancing Ganesa whereas at the Ravalaphadi Cave at Aihole he is associated with the dancing Siva and the Saptamatrikas. Later sculptures of Ganesa are found in the Cave temples of Ellora. Colossal images of Ganesa are to be found at Hampi in Karnataka and in Tripura state in Bengal.

Probably one of the earliest images of Ganesa in terracotta comes from Bhitargaon brick temple and from the ancient site of Akra, N.W.F.P., and may be dated to about

37



38



Fig.37 Nritya Ganesa. Metal.
South India. 16th cent. A.D. 4.5 cm.

Fig.38 Nritya Ganesa. Metal.
South India. 16th cent. A.D. 15.5 cm.
Bal Tambe Collection.

Fig.39 Tantric Ganesa. Metal.
South India. 16th cent. A.D. 7.5 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

39



fifth century A.D.

Images of Ganesa were always placed on the south side of the outer wall of the linga shrines and few temples dedicated to him were built facing south.

Metal images of Ganesa are too numerous to deal here as invariably every region in India has produced these in large numbers. Folk art invariably connected with folk religion has absorbed and transformed the classical heritage in forceful, though small, contributions. In the representation of folk bronzes of Ganesa a wealth of creative imagery is seen in different varieties, though these are modest pieces made for worship.

(Figs. 39-46)

Rajasthani artists were fond of depicting



Fig. 40 Tantric Ganesa. Metal.
Probably Eastern India, 13th cent. A.D. 7 cm.

Fig. 41 Valambhari Ganesa. Metal.
Folk. Provenance and date uncertain. 6 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Fig. 42 Tantric Ganesa. Metal.
Folk. Provenance and date uncertain. 4.8 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.

Digitized by Sarayu Foundation Trust, Delhi and eGangotri
 scenes of the early childhood of Ganesa in
 miniature paintings. Some fine examples are
 also seen in the Kangra miniatures.

(Fig. 47)

During the early mediaeval period when
 the Yogini cult and Tantricism started, Vainayaki
 or Ganesani, the female energy of Vinayaka,
 was worshipped along with other Yoginis.
 Vainayaki images are seen at the Chausath-
 Yogini temples at Rikhian, Bheraghat, Hirapur
 and Ranipur-Jhariyal. Vainayaki was also
 accepted as a Buddhist Tantric goddess
 Ganapatihrdya in Nepal.

(Fig. 48)

43



44



Fig.43 Valamburi Ganesa. Brass.
 Folk. Provenance and date uncertain. 7.3 cm.
 Heras Institute Collection.

Fig.44 Mayura Ganesa. Brass.
 Provenance and date uncertain. 7 cm.

Fig.45 Ganesa Metal
 Folk. 8 cm.
 Heras Institute Collection.

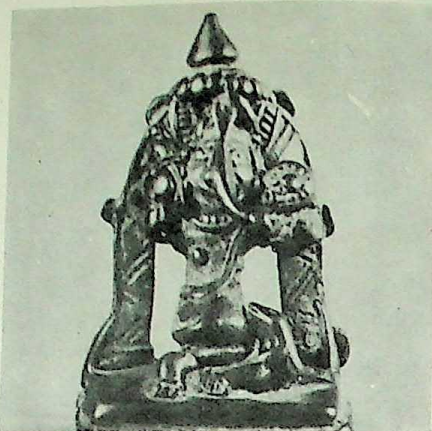
45



There are many pilgrimage centres of Ganesa throughout the length and breadth of India, among them, the Ashtavinayakas of Morgaon, Theur, Lenyadri, Ozar, Ranjangaon, Siddhatek, Pali and Mahad in Maharashtra are considered sacred.

In the strange and good natured physiognomy of Ganesa animal, human and divine elements are so well combined that we naturally bow down to him.

— B. V. Shetti



46



47

Fig.46 Tantric Ganesa. Brass.
Chamba (?) 15th cent. A.D. 8 cm.

Fig.47 Horoscope Illustration
Rajasthani School. Dated 1854 A.D. 14 x 25.5 cm.

Fig.48 Valnayaki. Metal
Madhya Pradesh. 17th cent. A.D. 12.4 cm.
Heras Institute Collection.



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Other Lenders to the exhibition

Shri Bal Tambe
Smt. Nalini Swali
Smt. Jayani Parikh
Smt. Rupa Dutia
Kumari Minal Swali
Kumar Shyamal Swali
Smt. Ranjana Shirodkar

Front Cover:

1. Ganesa, Stone,
Hoysale Period, 12th cent. A.D. 68.5 x 59 cm.
2. Ganesa with Saptamatrikas, Stone
Karnataka, 11th cent. A.D. 44.5 x 17.5 cm.

Back Cover

Ganesa with Saptamatrikas,
Bronze, Gujarat, 12th cent. A.D. 47 x 6 x 13.5
Heras Institute Collection

